Media release 16 July 1987

TL3313

CHRISTIAN REFLECTION ON EAST TIMOR LAUNCHED

A new statement of concern which calls on the international Church to work for a just settlement of the conflict in East Timor, was launched in Melbourne this week.

Speaking on behalf of the new Bishops Secretariat for Justice and Peace, Mr Eric Sidoti said the statement was 'very significant and the product of several years of discussion between human rights and development agencies and Protestant and Catholic organisations around the world'.

Representatives of thirteen Church groups and religious orders attended the launch which was organised by Christians in Solidarity with East Timor and held at the offices of Asian Bureau Australia.

Formerly a Portuguese colony, East Timor has been torn by military conflict since Indonesia invaded and tookover the territory in 1975.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Perez de Cuellar recently visited Portugal as part of his on-going initiative to find an internationally acceptable solution to the conflict.

Most Timorese are Catholic. The diocese of Dili is administered directly by the Vatican through an Apostolic Administrator, Mgr Carlos Belo, because of the disputed political status of the territory.

The statement was finalised at a consultation of European Church groups held in Geneva in February. Australia's Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace endorsed the statement in March and published it as a CCJP issues paper.

Mr Sidoti said the document reaffirms support for the people of East Timor and their basic needs 'which include their need for freedom, cultural integrity, and social and political development of their own choice'.

Neither military force nor attempts to bury the issue would produce the just and lasting settlement the East Timorese long for and need more than anything else, he said.

'East Timor is the benchmark of our commitment to justice in this region. To let it fade away as an issue is a license to let this sort of tragedy happen again', he said.

Participants at the lauching undertook to circulate the statement widely within parishes, schools and religious orders for reflection and discussion.

Copies of the reflection East Timor, a forgotten people, are available from Christians in Solidarity with East Timor, PO Box 1092, North Fitzroy, Vic. 3068. $3.00 each.

Further information: Christine Perkins 03/ 419 5588